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The Relation of the Trade School to the Trade

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The Relation of the Trade School to the Trade

An Address by

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delivered at the Graduating Exercises of the
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The Relation of the Trade School to the Trade

I AM to address you on the specific subject, "The Relation of the Trade School to the Trade." This naturally leads me away from the broad and interesting field which a discussion of the value of a trade to the individual always opens, but the restrictions which my subject imposes will or should be of advantage, inasmuch as my observations must be concentrated upon a feature of the general subject of trade-training which has brought out widely divergent opinions among those most deeply concerned in the welfare of those who are addressing themselves to "learning a trade" with the expectation and hope that they will be able to earn their living by practicing the trade when learned.

There have been and still are those who believe that a craft in all its essentials may be acquired through the instruction and practice afforded in a trade school; and there have been and still are those who claim that the trade school can do little more than impart a moderate amount of knowledge and facility in the minor features of a craft, and that the major part of the technique and skilful handling of tools and of the individual can only be expected through contact with the varying demands of the trade itself as operated upon a commercial basis.

It appears to me that the explanation of this wide divergence of opinion may be found in the

fact that the trade school itself is not as yet very fully developed, at all events is very far from being fully taken advantage of, and that while upon the one hand we have the enthusiasts who, before anything is thoroughly tested, rush to the conclusion that the trade school is capable of curing all the ills that the changes in the conduct of work and other pressures have wrought in the body of the trades; upon the other hand we have those who, with equal haste and lack of experience conclude that any method of teaching a craft other than "the way of the fathers" has very little practical value in it. The "way of the fathers," *i.e.* the "old apprenticeship system," was most valuable and at the time perhaps the only available way, but it does not by any means follow that that way exhausted all the possibilities or provided anything which a later time and a larger scope of work and opportunity might develop; neither should it be argued that newer forms render useless or may safely shoulder out of the way certain features or accompaniments of older methods.

Trade schools have already justified their existence, but I apprehend that the careful observer has noted that we have thus far only been feeling our way, and that we may anticipate not simply that the trade school "has come to stay," but that its opportunity for usefulness has only been hinted at in what may be termed a primary stage of its development.

Just at the present moment there is a widespread interest, an aroused concern, in industrial training. The world seems to have awakened to the fact that education has not been advanced as it should be along industrial lines. Those who have been brought into closest contact with the investigations now under way in this field, find, among many other questions, the very important one which is suggested in the topic I am discussing, namely, what relation does the trade school bear to the trade itself, and how can opportunity for trade training be offered so as to advance the best interests of the individuals who engage in it, of the trade itself, and of the community as a whole?

In my judgment the answer to this question will be found in the conclusion that the trade school can only hope to attain its legitimate use and best results when it goes hand in hand with the trades themselves — in other words the greatest effectiveness of the school instruction will come when it is pursued coincident with work at the trade — trade-training on the job.

I cannot conceive it possible for a trade school to graduate a full-fledged and efficient craftsman, *i. e.* a workman equal to the proper execution of work, any more than a law school can turn out a craftsman of the law, *i. e.* an attorney not only legally qualified but equal to efficient and proper handling of legal matters. In either case, as in others of similar character, the efficiency which

is wholly a personal matter and which fixes largely the value of individual effort can only be gained by degrees and under the conditions which the craft in operation presents.

The word *craft* suggests an illustration:

A school of instruction for those who wish to become sailors may readily be conceived of as possible, up to a certain point, *on land*, but however well equipped the student may be with knowledge of mast and sail and rope and the intricacies of adjustment necessitated by all the winds that blow, however nimbly and dexterously he may handle himself on some firm-planted rigging on the stable shore, his test can only come when he attempts to tread the deck and climb the mast and cling to swaying spar as the vessel rolls and tosses on the waves, or essays to guide her as she plunges through real seas.

It is one thing to acquire knowledge as to what can and should be done under certain circumstances, and quite another thing to perform the work under actual conditions with all their accompaniments of danger and responsibility.

What the community at all times especially needs is men and women properly trained for the tasks they are to undertake in life; and so far as schools may be helpful they should be established as a means toward an end, understanding always that best methods can only be determined through long and patient experience with the usual accompaniment of mistakes.

I think it is quite fully recognized now, however different a theory may once have prevailed, that schools cannot accomplish everything even for the most exceptional student. There must be opportunity for application and adaptation of the principles and processes which have been taught, in order that facility in the work itself may be acquired.

All this is particularly true of the skilled manual trades, *i.e.* the trades that require something more than mere exertion of the muscles in pure labor or toil,—and everything in our experience in the premises thus far seems to me to point to the conclusion that opportunity for application and adaptation of the school instruction and school technique to real work should be close and intimate — should be practically in collaboration with the school.

If this conclusion is correct, then it may well follow that any other method of trade training than one pursued as I have indicated, *i.e.* in conjunction with work at the trade itself, may be unfair and undesirable, whether the opportunity for such training be furnished by the State or otherwise.

Whatever training for a trade is offered, it seems to me that this discrimination should be exercised in order that injustice may not be done to the individual or to the trade itself.

It would be unfair to the individual who really wishes to become a workman to allow him to

enter a trade school with the idea that he could there be fully fitted and made a complete and efficient workman ; and it would be equally unfair to the trade itself to send half-trained men out into the field. Neither is it worth while to spend the time and money of either public or private trade schools, to any extent, in training those who have no serious purpose as regards the trade, who only want to know how to perform its various manual functions. While dilettanti of this character do not operate as harmfully to the trade itself as do the half-equipped men who intrude before their time into actual work in competition with others who are following the trade as a calling, they do not, at all events, harmonize with the general spirit and serious purpose of the work in hand,—that is the proper training of those who are undertaking to do the real practical work of the world as craftsmen.

I ask you to bear these points clearly in mind :

First : That trade instruction in schools should be differentiated in our minds from the trade training which must be elsewhere obtained, and that this trade instruction can furnish but part of the theory and part of the technique.

Second : That the rest of the theory and the rest of the technique, which perhaps is to result eventually in developing a "craftsman," can *only* be secured through practice on actual work under trade and commercial conditions.

Third : That the most effective way to give

the student these two divisions of instruction and training is to associate them as closely as the conditions of the particular kind of business will permit, so that the school instruction and the trade training proper may be practically simultaneous.

Fourth: That it is unfair to the individual who undertakes to learn a trade to furnish him with less than full opportunity to perfect himself as a craftsman.

Fifth: That it is unfair to any trade itself or to the craftsmen engaged in it, to turn out half-equipped workmen who tend not only to produce a poor quality of work, but to act as improper competitors against competent craftsmen.

Sixth: That the interest of the community, particularly if it is to pay a portion of the expense, demand a product from trade instruction and trade training that shall be a reasonably complete product—as near an all-around development of each individual in his chosen trade as can be expected of that individual, to the end that those who are to be accepted as "craftsmen" in the skilled trades may be capable of performing the work as it should be done.

With these points in view, let us consider what process may be approved as most likely to produce the desired result.

It seems to me that the road is comparatively straight, although not absolutely clear.

I would like to say, in parentheses, that while I am of the opinion that instruction of children

should include, even at a very early age, fundamentals in uses of the hand, as well as fundamentals in the uses of the brain, and that all along through the years of their primary as well as their advanced instruction they should be familiarized with the useful manual methods of work with which they will come in contact when they pass out of school life, I am just as firmly convinced that no place should be given in the general school curriculum for "trade instruction" *per se*, — this should be kept apart, as I shall later indicate.

The process which will lead to best results, it seems to me, should start with the presumption that the distinct instruction which a real trade school may properly offer should not be open indiscriminately—that is, without regard to the fitness of applicants, or to the ends they have in view.

(2) Those who are accepted for instruction in the school should be those, and those only, who have positively dedicated themselves to the trade they wish instruction in, and this dedication should be manifested by commitment as an apprentice to some reputable employer who, as his share in the enterprise, will at least engage to put the apprentice into such relations with actual work that he may be getting that practical training in the trade essential to supplement and complete the instruction he is contemporaneously receiving in the school.

(3) Employers should be required, in turn, not

to take on any apprentices except upon condition that they attend the trade school, if there be one in that branch, for the purpose of keeping up in the instruction which the school provides.

(4.) Employer and apprentice together should be held to utilize the opportunities of the trade school instruction and the trade training on the work in as close association as the conditions under which the particular trade is carried on make possible. If conditions permit a division of day-time hours, so that a part of the week may be spent in the school and part on the work, it should be so arranged, but if this be not feasible, then an equivalent of this arrangement should be provided by evening work in the school. In some cases where large shops or establishments have or can have an apprentice school of their own, under their own roof, so to speak, an ideal condition of interchange of time between instruction and training on actual work is possible; but in most cases in the manual trades, especially in the building trades, this opportunity is not possible of accomplishment, and a less ideal condition must be accepted.

The mutual responsibility which the process above described is based upon is, to my mind, vitally essential to best results. This combined obligation must be fixed and positive if we are ever to hope for a high development of trade schools.

In this connection, it seems to me appropriate to refer to an important suggestion made, I think,

at one of the hearings this winter before a committee of our State Legislature.

That suggestion was that in arranging any method of trade training under State direction, control, or supervision, specific preference should be given to co-operation with groups of employers who are naturally and properly supposed to have concern in the development of craftsmen in their line of work.

This suggestion appeals to me with ever increasing significance, and I am thoroughly convinced that unless some such method of utilizing the force which employers, and employers alone, represent be adopted, that much of the money which the State may expend will be wasted.

My reason for believing that actual, specific trade instruction ought not to be mingled with the general education which is considered essential for all, whatever their future calling in life may be, is surely a practical one, to wit, that such a mingling is a physical impossibility.

Justice cannot be done to the fundamental general courses, and at the same time and under the same direction to specific trade courses. To make place and provision for both in one general curriculum is absurd—all may need to be thoroughly grounded in the few fundamental studies which form the underlying structure for general civilized life, and all are more or less fitted to acquire what is needful in these lines ; but all do not need and should not be expected to spend time upon

trade instruction more than of the rudimentary, suggestive character to which I have previously referred.

Separate schools for trade instruction are essential, but they should not be utilized until the student has arrived at an age where choice may be intelligently made and a serious conclusion reached as to his life work.

The separate trade school with co-operation of employers also gives favorable opportunity for concentrated observation upon the part of instructors and employers, so that the unfitness of a student for a chosen calling may be speedily determined and his true bent discovered.

Finally I offer this suggestion. The opportunity for usefulness of a specific trade school has, for the most part, been considered as one that could only be taken advantage of by the comparatively young—at all events, by those just entering upon a trade; but in considering the relation of the trade school to the trade, I think it well to comprehend that many of those who consider themselves good enough mechanics might become more valuable to themselves and to the craft generally should they place themselves under instruction in the trade school in their spare hours, either day or evening.

The old maxim informs us that "It is never too late to mend." This might well be modified to read, "One is never too old to learn," and as in all the manual trades or callings the most skill-

ful workman is the one most sought, as well as the highest paid, I am inclined to the belief that the value of the trade school to the individual workman, to the trade, and to the community, will not have its fullest demonstration until it shall have so enlarged its scope and advanced its methods that the skilled craftsman as well as the entered apprentice shall find within its doors encouragement and opportunity for constant development and improvement.